DCCUMENT RESUME

ED 033 894 SP 003 255

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TITLE	Cbstacles tc Change: The Westchester Report. Cccasional Paper Four, The NDEA Naticnal Institute fcr Advanced Study in Teaching Disadvantaged Youth.
INSTITUTION	American Asscciaticn cf Colleges for Teacher Education, Washingtcn, D.C.; Ball State Univ., Muncie, Ind.
Spons Agency	Cffice of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
Pub Date	Cct 68
Note	3p.
Available from	American Asscciation of Colleges for Teacher Educaticn, 1 Dupcnt Circle, Washington, D.C. 20036 ($0.35 cash)
EDRS Price	EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.25
Descriptors	Disadvantaged Youth, *Educaticnal Innovation, *Inservice Teacher Education, *Instructional Staff, Organizaticnal Climate, Parent School Relaticnship, *Practicums, Program Design, Resource Staff Rcle, Summer Prcgrams, Team Teaching

Abstract

A fcllcw-up study was made of a 1966 summer retraining program designed to increase the range cf teacher ccmpetencies in dealing with disadvantaged youth within the classrocm and teacher understanding cf the concerns of parents of disadvantaged ycuth as a major means of effecting educational change. The 4-week program involved abcut 15C teachers and supporting perscnnel in guidance, reading, and administraticn in a practicum in which fcur 2-member teams were assigned to each cf 20 classes cf 15-2C students. Each team planned units of work, observed cther teams, taught, evaluated teaching, reviewed display materials and met with parents cf children. The follcw-up ccnsisted of focused interviews in Ncvember 1966 and February 1967 with a representative sample cf 72 participants. Findings revealed that many if not all of the plans cf the summer had been forgotten under the press of events and that few changes were carried cver into the regular year by either teachers cr nonclassroom personnel. The insularity of the schccl frcm the hcmes cf disadvantaged youth was particularly noteworthy. Implicaticns included these: School structure mclds the cutlcck cf schccl perscnnel with regard to teaching and learning and with regard tc professicnal relaticnships--which are gcverned more by power cf hierarchy than by fccus cn the teaching situaticn.

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THE NDEA NATIONAL INSTITUTE
for advanced study in teaching disadvantaged youth

OCCASIONAL PAPER/FOUR

October, 1968

1201 SIXTEENTH STREET, N.W. ■ WASHINGTON, D.C. 20036

ED033894

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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OBSTACLES TO CHANGE: THE WESTCHESTER REPORT

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A Project supported by the Office of Education administered by The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education in conjunction with Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana

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The National Institute for Advanced Study in Teaching Disadvantaged Youth sponsored an intensive followup of a retraining program for teachers of disadvantaged youth. This retraining program, funded by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Title I, was held in the summer of 1966 in three Westchester County (New York) communities. It involved teachers, guidance workers, principals, and related educational personnel—approximately 150 in all.

Intensive discussions with the chief administrative officers of 27 school districts directed the focus of the program. Discussions centering on the inability of teachers to deal with disadvantaged within the context of the regular classroom, and on the lack of any meaningful communications between teachers and school personnel and the parents of disadvantaged children, led to identification of two major objectives:

A wider range of teacher competencies in dealing with disadvantaged youth within the classroom;

Increased teacher understanding of the concerns of parents of disadvantaged youth as a major means of effecting educational change.

In executing the program, teachers were invited to participate in either of two one-month sessions at three selected schools. Teachers were selected by the administrative leaders of each district on the basis of their need to work with disadvantaged youth and on the prospect of their future assignment to classes with a high proportion of such youth. Before the close of the regular school year, children were invited to participate in the program. When the program opened, twenty classrooms in the three schools were manned by approximately 150 teachers and related supporting personnel in guidance, reading, and administration—75 in each session. The 300 (approximately) students were divided into classrooms with 8 teachers and 15-20 students.

Each teacher was in a team of two, with four teams to a classroom. During each week of the four-week session, each team engaged in one of four activities: planning a unit of work; observing a team of teachers in action; teaching the class; and evaluating the current teaching. These assignments with the children or with related activities were carried out in the morning sessions. Afternoon sessions were devoted to internal planning of the next day's or week's work, to a critique of the preceding teaching sessions, to a review of new materials on display, or to meeting the parents of the children.

The last of these activities—meeting the parents of the children—was conducted with the aid of community

social workers, administrative personnel, and often included late afternoon and evening sessions. Parental concerns, strengths of the home, relations between parents and children, and the program of the school were some of the topics covered in these school-home visits, designed to involve the parents in the school sessions. A stipulation of these visits was that the teachers were to make every effort to meet the parents in their homes, not merely to invite them into the school for consultation.

The educational specialists within each school were considered as key members of the teaching staff, and special attention was given to employing their unique skills in the classroom. The guidance worker, the reading teacher, the psychologist, and the administrative personnel were asked to contribute to the reorganization of the classroom rather than to receive referrals from teachers. Further, the staff was instructed to keep the two major objectives in mind at all times: *i.e.,* to look for ways to modify classroom structure or teaching procedures in order to accommodate to the learning disabilities of the children; and to look for clues to a better home-school relationship.

The major operational difficulty of the project was that the plan of operation, its implementation, and all necessary arrangements had to be made within a two-month period. Although the nature of the conceptualized program in these three schools required extensive planning and involvement for a large measure of success, lead time for optimum planning and involvement was not available. Undoubtedly, this lack had some bearing on the eventual outcome of the program. It also seems apparent that school personnel involved in teaching, administering, guiding, or remediating current programs cannot give very much time to a new program which will become a reality only in the future.

With an awareness of these obvious cautions, but with much enthusiasm, the program's two sessions began. When the program ended, there were some hand shakes, some criticisms, and a short vacation. An evaluation utilizing teacher responses to a ten-item questionnaire was attempted, but this floundered because of inadequate planning and lack of follow-through.

In many respects, this summer program was typical of many summer programs in which teachers are introduced to a topic or a concept, and given a practicum in which to work. They then go back to the regular classroom ready to apply what has, allegedly, been learned.

It was at this point (October, 1966) that a proposal was put to the National Committee of the NDEA National Institute for Advanced Study in Teaching Disadvantaged Youth for an intensive follow-up of the program in Westchester County. The follow-up was cast in the form of a focused interview, with a sampling of all groups involved in the project. The first of these interviews were gathered in a two day schedule during November of 1966 by Philip Freedman, Hunter College, New York City, and Vernon Haubrich, a member of the National Institute Committee's Task Force and Professor of Educational Policy Studies, University of Wisconsin, Madison. During February, 1967, more teachers, administrators, and other educational workers were interviewed. In all, 72 teachers and other educational personnel were interviewed; there was equal sampling at the three schools in the project.

The form of the interview schedule was designed primarily to elicit from teachers information regarding the impact of the summer program on their regular classroom organization, structure, or on teaching procedures modified as a result of the previous summer's program. With respect to the major objectives of the summer's program, the interview schedule was designed additionally to ascertain if teachers were still cognizant of the program's actual objectives. Finally, participants were asked to indicate what changes they would make if they were to plan the program for another year.

The specific questions asked the respondents were—

1. Aside from $75.00 a week, what else was of value to you in the project?
2. Can you list several specific benefits to you as a teacher, counselor, administrator, etc.?
3. Can you list some of the specific measures that you have been able to implement in the classroom and/or your line of work? (If negative, indicate why not.)
4. If you were to plan the project for next summer, what changes would you make?

The general conclusion of both interviewers was that once the teachers and other educational personnel returned to their regular classrooms or offices, many, if not all, of the plans of the previous summer were forgotten under the press of events. The number of changes carried over into the regular year by both teachers and non-classroom personnel was slight. In not one case was the second major objective of the program—contact and understanding of parents—remembered, nor was anything done to continue any line of home contact as intended by the summer program.

Questions 1 and 2, which related to general impressions of the educational worker together with benefits to him had good responses, but these showed themselves to be limited in the operation of the classroom or school or particular office which concerned the person. It seemed that once the person returned to his habitat, the limitation of role and function could not be transcended. Moreover, as long as the respondent did not have to list specific ways in which the classroom or office operation changed, he could talk a good game for the interviewer.

Typical responses to the first question, "Aside from the $75.00 a week, what else was of value to you in the project?" were the following:

"The opportunity to use new materials."

"The opportunity to observe other teachers in action."

"The low teacher-pupil ratios."

"The flexibility as to methods, procedures, curriculums, etc."

The second question, "Can you list several specific

benefits to you as a teacher, counselor, administrator, etc.?" brought similar responses, but these were related more to the class level at which the teacher operated. It is important to indicate here that a benefit little noted by the respondents was the contact with experts in reading, guidance, psychology, and the like. Teachers did not see these other educational personnel as an aid to the operation of the classroom; and evidently these other educational personnel did not see the classroom as their field of operation or, indeed, as any of their business. The stratification of role and function had done its work remarkably well to so separate the specialists from the children and teachers.

The third question, which asked teachers and other educational personnel to list specific measures implemented during the regular work of the classroom or school, brought a most disappointing response. The question, "Can you list some of the specific measures that you have been able to implement in the classroom and/or your line of work?" brought responses, again general in nature and largely directed to many non-classroom aspects of the school's operation. Some of the typical responses (when there were responses) were—

"Some new materials have been implemented."

"Some new teaching techniques have been adopted."

"A better insight into the behavior of one's colleagues and of the pupils called disadvantaged has been achieved."

Included in the third question was the corollary, "Why were you unable to implement any changes?" The responses to this question are revealing:

"The conditions of the project did not exist in the regular school year."

"The pupil-teacher ratios were unreal in the project."

"The regular school year has inflexible programming demands."

One of the major findings of the follow-up concerned the inability of any team of educational workers to carry forward a new concept into the regular year because "The rules will not permit." The institutional structure of the school was not modifiable even if the new innovation seemed to be worth a try. The impression of both interviewers was that the rules of the game in the regular school year did not include classroom modification or parental contact; therefore, they were not in the "program." Any such program seemed to be submerged by a series of rationalizations which avoided the issues of classroom modification and parental contact as the two objectives to be attained.

When the teachers and other educational workers directed their attention to changes which could be made in a future program (the fourth question), they again returned to a general and verbal set. The question, "If you were to plan the project for next summer, what changes would you make?," brought many and varied responses. Typical of these were—

"More of an orientation to the program before it begins"

"Longer duration for the project (make it eight weeks for all teachers and students; not four and four)"

Teachers felt that the experts should be in the classroom more often to give more specific help. Other educational personnel felt that the new situation required more time for adjustment to the scene.

It is most interesting to note that in no case did the teachers consider the parental contact and bridging aspect of the project when they considered changes to be made for the next summer. The reason for this is not that the program already worked so well in this area, but rather that teachers and other educational personnel seemed just not to consider the home or parents when they thought of teaching and learning and schools. The insularity of the school from the homes of disadvantaged youth became one of the paramount findings of the follow-up.

In summing up, both of the interviewers were impressed by the unanimity both of opinions on each of the questions asked and of the relative categories into which the responses tended to fall. We were also impressed by the generalities of the respondents and by their inability to focus on specific classroom modification which might be applied after the summer program. Most assuredly, we were impressed by the *distance* of teachers from the homes and from the parents of disadvantaged youth—in short, from the people and places where much of the emotional and intellectual support for the school's program just might eventually be found.

Implications are guesses, but, using these interviews, let us guess a bit. The following may be thought of as considerations for future program planners in the retraining of teachers and other educational personnel:

- The institutional structure of schooling molds the outlook of teachers and other controlling figures not only with regard to teaching and learning, but also with regard to professional relationships within a school.
- These professional relationships are governed by a series of role and function definitions in which the power of hierarchy is more powerful than any focus on the teaching situation.
- Summer programs can be thought of only as a segment of retraining; retraining must include the regular school program. Moreover, provision must be made to include the regular school program in retraining plans.
- A program to re-educate all educational personnel in the critical nature of home support for school activity is desperately needed, and therefore of urgent priority on any agenda for training.
- The involvement of all parties relevant to a retraining program is essential in future designs for retraining. Here *relevant parties* is intended to mean teachers, middle management personnel, specialists in cubicles, administrators in offices, parents, community leaders, and whenever possible, students themselves.